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The Senator's Widow.

The senator himself was not dead, but in the prime of life and well and active most of the time—not very far remote—during which the widow flourished. His name was not Smith; but that patronymic will serve him well enough perhaps in connection with the present chronicle. The widow's name was Clinch—Caroline her friends called her. She was a little woman with a good figure, a face neither handsome nor homely, but prepossessing. The first time the senator met her he thought she was decidedly attractive, and she won his attention in her behalf at once. She had brought a letter of introduction from a friend, and he had come out from the senate chamber into the ladies' parlor to see her. Her business was about a little legislation respecting a pension that she believed was due her.

"You may count on my assistance," he said, readily, after hearing her story. "I will see if anything can be done."

"And I suppose," she pleaded, with a winning smile, "It won't take a great while; that it can all be settled for me pretty soon?"

"These matters have to go through a certain routine that takes time." He indulged in a smile, also. "But I'll push it all I can, of course."

"You are very kind. And I shall be so very, very much obliged to you," she said, terminating the interview.

When the senator got back to his desk he set to work, while the aroma of her presence still lingered near, looking over the papers she had left with him. He had been in the senate only a couple of weeks, and public business had not yet accumulated on his hands. The widow's claim, luckily for her, was among the first of such that fell to him; and, more fortunate still, the papers in the case were all made out and the statements complete. Her deceased husband, it appeared, had been a captain in one of the volunteer regiments from the senator's state during the late war, and had applied for a pension, which had been granted. But the captain's death occurred the same day the certificate was issued and before it was indorsed by him. The commissioner had, therefore, refused to pay the accumulated pension to the captain's widow, believing that such a case needed special legislation. The senator decided to draw up a bill.

The next morning the widow was in the gallery as soon as the senate convened, radiant and expectant, to hear the bill introduced. She knew the senator was destined to become one of the great orators of his party, and she was anxious to hear his first speech. She had an opera-glass concealed in her muff, and as often as she could use it without making herself conspicuous she did so. The senator sat at his desk in the back row across the chamber, where she could watch him plainly. By and by, after much routine business, he was recognized by the chair, said a few words that the widow failed to hear, handed a bundle of papers to a page, and then sat down to read his letters. Shortly his secretary came to tell her that the bill had been referred to the committee on pensions who would report it sooner or later. She was disappointed; but when she got back to the small hotel where she was staying she wrote a glowing letter home to her confidante, a Mrs. Sawyer, in which she did full justice to the speech that she imagined ought to have been made in her behalf. She praised the senator's brilliant oratory, his personal appearance, his kindness, and added a word also about his polite secretary.

But all this being over, time, as it passed in an obscure room of a third-rate hotel, undoubtedly began to hang heavy on the widow's hands. The next forenoon the senator found her in the rotunda of the capitol, and surmised she had been there all the morning, lying in wait for him. She showed much surprise, however, when she saw him, and declared she was searching for the library of congress. He went with her to the door, and then stepped in a moment to impress on her the fact that the library was something the country should be proud of: that it was, in fact, one of the largest collections of books in the world, and that when the time arrived he meant to do all he could to have the collection put in a suitable structure—one that the country, in future ages, might point to with pride. While he was giving vent to these patriotic sentiments a colored employee, who had recognized him, moved up two chairs, and, unconscious of what he was doing, the senator settled down in one of them.

The widow flushed with pleasure. This was an attention, evidently, she had not dared even to hope for, and she summoned all her wits to make the most of it. Her bill was what she really wanted to talk about; but she was not quite certain that it would be in good taste to begin the subject immediately. Perhaps the senator had given himself up to a moment of relaxation and desired merely a social chat.

"I suppose you gentlemen spend a great deal of time in here?" she said. "It must be a place of great value to you."

"Well, no; I haven't come here yet very often myself," he was obliged to admit, looking around rather unfamiliarly at the crowded alcoves. "I have heard that Sumner used to do a good deal of work here; but I don't believe that many of the senators now-a-days find the time to come here. The fact is, the pressure of public business is getting to be very severe."

"Oh! I suppose so!" she murmured, with a sympathetic note in her voice. "So much care and responsibility! It must be very arduous."

"It's the work in the committee rooms that consumes time," the senator continued, stroking his wiry gray mustache, and contracting his brows, according to his habit when conversing. "That's what the public don't hear much about, and so the majority think a congressman has nothing to do but distribute public documents and garden seeds."

"Why, what an absurd idea! I'm sure, for my part, I have always believed they must work very hard. But I don't quite understand about the committees. I'm like everybody else, perhaps. What will that committee do, for instance—the committee on pensions—with the bill you kindly introduced for me yesterday?"

"They'll examine the evidence as set forth in the attached statements and affidavits. Then they'll report, through their chairman, what conclusions they have come to in regard to the bill. It will then be submitted to the senate to pass or reject.

"There can't be any doubt about them favoring the bill, I suppose? They'll see that it is just and quite right; won't they?" she asked, anxiously.

"We'll hope so," he said, looking at his watch. "It's a proper bill."

"They can decide about it in a day or two; can't they? It is such a small matter that, surely, it can't take long."

"The committee have so much business, though, you see, to attend to. There's such a constant pressure of unsettled matters before them that it may take—well, it may take till the last part of the session, for all I know," he explained, frankly, consulting his watch again and rising.

"As long as that?" she said, much surprised and disappointed.

"Only four or five months, you know. Not so very long, after all."

"But it is quite a while for me to wait here in Washington."

"That will not be necessary; will it? I shall watch the matter and keep it up to the front."

"Oh! I'm sure I'm very much obliged for your kindness."

A plump, matronly lady, richly dressed, had come into the wing of the library where they were. She was waiting for him, and he went out with her.

The next he heard of the widow was that she was back in Highbury, where she had originated, to the great regret of the mutual friend who had given her the letter of introduction to him. While deep in the midst of his editorial duties in the office of the Highbury Journal she came back on his hands in an anxious and troubled state of mind. It was late in the afternoon, and he was just finishing up an elaborate editorial on the political outlook for the next issue; but he struck work at once. There was something about the widow that he could never resist. This little business of hers had already taken up so much of his time that it was a question now whether he had not better resign and devote himself to her altogether.

"Oh! but you know, Mr. Tripler," she said in her own beguiling little way, "that those gentlemen can ask one another for favors; and if you write and ask the senator to ask that committee to attend to the bill at once, it will all come to pass without delay. And I really need the money so much, you know."

There were tears in her voice, and Mr. Tripler wrote the letter forthwith, though he knew he was merely wasting stationery.

The following day the widow dropped in on Mr. Tripler again as soon as the morning mail arrived, to get a glimpse of the Congressional Record, which the senator kept him supplied with. She made him promise to lay it aside for her every day. When her bill *was* reported, the fact would be stated in the Record, and, of course, she wished to know it without delay.

She was a charming little woman, Mr. Tripler admitted, but terribly persistent. Every day, when he heard her light steps on the stairs, he bid adieu to whatever great ideas he chanced to be struggling with, and waited calmly for the light knock on his door that was sure to follow. She always opened the door very gently, and a blush spread over her face, like a breath on a mirror. She hoped she did not interrupt him; he must tell her if she did.

One day, however, after six or seven weeks had passed without bringing any news of the bill, the widow's friend, Mrs. Sawyer, offered a suggestion.

"Caroline," she said, "I believe that if you'd go to Washington and get acquainted with the men on that committee, they'd hunt that bill up for you and do something about it."

Mr. Tripler considered this a good motion, and seconded it with zeal. So, after some hesitation, it came to pass that the widow appeared again at the capital

As soon as she had accomplished the long journey from the remote regions of Highbury, of course she made haste not to let the grass grow under her small feet before she reported to the senator. She found him at one of the ancient hotels, where he lived the life of a bachelor entertaining a few friends at dinner. His manner as he came into the parlor to see her was a little brusque perhaps; but the sight of her meek, pleading face smoothed him down. No one could easily be angry with the widow. She was such an inoffensive little woman; and her large blue eyes, whenever the occasion seemed to require anything of the kind, could become so subdued and pleading that she usually won plenty of sympathy. He wished that she was in Texas, or almost anywhere, as soon as he found out that she wanted letters of introduction to all the members of the committee on pensions; but he tried to decline accommodating her with as much good humor as he could muster.

"I am really afraid, you see, it may hurt the chances of the bill if we press the committee too closely," he said. "Of course it would give me pleasure to introduce you to the chairman or any of the others with whom I am acquainted; but I am afraid they don't like to be hurried. If they took the bill up out of its regular order it might be considered hastily, you know, and its points slighted. I mean unintentionally, of course; unintentionally."

"Still it could'nt do any harm," said the widow, reinforcing her persistency with her gentle manner and winning smile. "It could'nt really offend them if I told them how very much I am obliged to depend on their kindness. Could'nt I just tell them that?"

"Oh! of course," answered the senator, good-naturedly. "But there's so many who, perhaps, tell them or write them that also. Would it really be apt to help the bill along, do you think?"

"I would like to try," the widow confessed.

The senator stroked his mustache and contracted his brows, as though he were a trifle perplexed. "The chairman of the committee is in—in fact," he said, "rather an abrupt man, and not easily approached. You musn't mind that, though."

"No," she answered softly.

There was no escaping—the senator saw that—and he made no further attempt. He provided her with a note, introducing her to the chairman (whom she could ask, he suggested, to introduce her to the others), and then bowed her out.

But that was not to be the last of the little widow, as the senator fully realized. On his way to the capitol, the next morning, almost the first person he caught sight of was no other than she herself, bound in the same direction. She was on the opposite side of the avenue, tripping along energetically, and he lingered before a store window long enough for her to increase the distance between them a block or so. He happened, however, to be very much engrossed with a question that was coming up for debate that day, and as he proceeded, oblivious to everything around him, he soon forgot the widow, and walked faster than he meant to walk. Near where Pennsylvania Avenue begins to bend to the south of the capitol, he looked up suddenly, and beheld her crossing daintly toward him. Right here, on the left hand corner going east, is a bar-room made conspicuous by a large sign projecting over the sidewalk, bearing the significant reminder, "The Last Chance." The words this morning seemed to the bewildered senator to be meant for him, and he dodged into the place without stopping to consider what a fatal error he might be committing. He owed his seat in the senate chiefly to his pronounced temperance principles; and the only speech he had made during the session which had been noticed was on the rules restricting the sale of intoxicating liquors in the senate restaurant. He had hardly stepped inside the door when the proprietor's beaming countenance assured him he was recognized; and the bar-keeper whirled a tumbler on the bar, and stood ready instantly to serve him. Had he been a smoker he could have purchased a cigar; but he was an avowed enemy to tobacco in any form. Clearly he had no business in any such retreat, and he was decidedly confused while keeping one eye on the widow through the screen of the door and at the same time trying to offer an excuse for his presence until she passed. He made some show of taking out his watch to compare it with the bar-room clock, and then he rushed out-doors again, red in the face. He wondered all the rest of the day whether the widow had seen him. If she told anything of the kind in Highbury his political opponents might make capital out of it.

The widow had given no sign whether she saw him or not, while walking straight ahead; but her friend, Mrs. Sawyer, and then Mr. Tripler eventually learned that she did see him, and that she was "completely taken aback" and shocked. She was on her way to call on the chairman of the committee on pensions, to whom she had the senator's note; and, as Mrs. Sawyer and Mr. Tripler learned, the chairman, when she succeeded in coming face to face with him, proved more difficult to manage than the usual run of the sterner sex whom she encountered. With his hands thrust into his pockets, he listened stolidly to what she had to say, chewed the end of a cigar stump a moment, reflecting, and then said decidedly that he didn't believe the committee could attend to the matter, at any rate for some weeks yet.

"There are lots of these bills that have been waiting ever since last session that we must attend to first, of course," he said, looking at her indifferently. "This pension business is just about the biggest business the country's got, and we haven't any time to spare to take things up out of order."

"He was a short, bulky man, with a head noticeably bald and large, deeply-seamed face, set off with a thick gray mustache and goatee that were stained with tobacco. He had been a general in war days. The widow, to express it in the idiomatic, took his measure.

"My husband always used to say that you were a *very kind* general," she said in her subdued manner, and blushing.

The interview was short; but the general promised to have the bill looked up. Then the widow went home and wrote to Mrs. Sawyer that she knew she could twist these men right round her finger if they'd give her time enough.

A couple of weeks later—one Saturday when the senate was not in session—the senator found the widow with his secretary in the room of the committee on patents, of which he was a member, awaiting his coming. She had called on his secretary three or four times during this period, but he himself had missed seeing her since introducing her to the general, from whom she now brought a sealed letter. It was brief:

"Smith, for heaven's sake give us a rest from this widow of yours! She is boring the life out of all of us. The committee cannot get a chance to hold a session. The clerk has mislaid her bill"

The senator's brows drew very close together and the blood mounted to his wrinkled forehead.

"The general has promised that the bill shall be reported in a few days," the widow said pleasantly.

"Yes, I'll go at once and see him, perhaps, if you'll excuse me."

He left her and hurried out along the lobby. He hoped that Thompson, his secretary, would soon get rid of her, and in the meanwhile he preferred to loiter at a safe distance. If the widow were the only one who was boring him, he reflected, he could put up with it, for there was something attractive about her; but there was a small mob about him all the time, begging for one thing or another. His peace had fled since he came to Washington. He walked to the library, and concealed himself as well as he could in one of the alcoves, where he turned over the leaves of a book and idled away a half-hour or more. After that he went on the balcony to get a breath of fresh air. While he stood there, he caught sight of the widow going slowly down the steps of the second terrace. It had begun to sprinkle, and she appeared to hesitate about proceeding. Presently, however, he saw his secretary appear opportunely with an umbrella and escort her down to the avenue.

Nothing more was heard of her for several days—until Thompson, in fact, notified her by a postal-card that her bill would be reported at once. Then it turned out that she was ill in an uncongenial boarding-house at the East End. She wrote a pitiful little note, that quite stirred Thompson's sympathy; and a day later, when it came his painful task to inform her that the bill had failed to pass—that it was defunct—he wrote three or four formal letters without hitting on any form of expression that seemed sufficiently consoling.

"Supposing you call on her, Thompson!" said the senator, after looking over these futile attempts. "Tell her I'm sorry, of course; that the thing could'nt be helped; that the committee was of the opinion that the law as it stands ought not to be changed, and that the senate concurred in the opinion. It there is anything else I can do for her of course"—

The senator stopped abruptly, though, and did not begin again. But when Thompson found himself in the presence of the widow, and she asked him tearfully whether he believed the

(CONTINUED ON FOURTH PAGE.)